

Digital Marketing in Library Promotion Using Social Media: The Experience of Three Academic Libraries in Germany

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Abstract: *This research investigates how digital marketing strategies are being integrated into three academic libraries in Germany, specifically focusing on using social media as a promotional tool. As academic libraries move from traditional marketing methods to digital platforms, they increasingly leverage social media channels like Instagram to engage with diverse user demographics, especially younger generations. The study's objectives include assessing the effectiveness of social media as a marketing tool, analyzing the strategies employed by library social media teams, identifying the most impactful platforms, and exploring the potential of social media to enhance library services and broaden user engagement. The study uses the purposive sampling technique to select the sample. Through qualitative research involving semi-structured interviews with library professionals at the Saxon State and University Library in Dresden, Freiburg University Library, and the Technical Information Library (TIB), this study identifies key themes in social media utilization, content strategies, and audience engagement. The findings reveal different approaches to social media management, with TIB and Freiburg implementing effective strategies for audience interaction and content diversification. In contrast, Dresden's social media team faces challenges due to limited resources. The study emphasizes the importance of personalized content, consistent branding, and a structured organizational approach to enhance user engagement. Furthermore, the proposed "Library Social Media Interaction Model" is a strategic framework to guide libraries in refining their digital marketing efforts, promoting better community engagement and service visibility in an increasingly digital landscape. Ultimately, these insights contribute to a deeper understanding of how academic libraries can adapt to and thrive in the evolving digital marketing environment.*

Keywords: *Digital Marketing, Social Media, Instagram, Library Promotion, Academic Libraries.*

1. Introduction

As the digital landscape evolves, academic libraries must adapt their promotional strategies to effectively engage a diverse and expanding user base. Among the multitudes of digital marketing strategies available, social media platforms, particularly Instagram, have emerged as essential tools for libraries aiming to connect with users and promote their services. This study investigates the experiences of three academic libraries in Germany, focusing on their utilization of social media as a marketing platform and the consequent effects on user engagement and awareness of library offerings. This

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research aims to illuminate effective practices that enhance library visibility and user connectivity as these institutions shift from conventional promotional methods to more dynamic digital approaches. The transition from traditional, manual, promotional techniques to digital platforms is particularly pronounced among academic libraries, which have adopted social media to broaden their outreach and cater to diverse user groups. Platforms like Instagram have become vital in disseminating information about library resources and services, which are increasingly tailored to meet specific user needs and interests.

This shift towards digital marketing reflects a broader digital transformation trend within information and academic practices. Academic libraries are investing significantly in physical and electronic resources; however, the optimal utilization of these assets significantly relies on one's ability to engage users effectively in the digital environment. Social media's interactive and user-friendly characteristics facilitate libraries in establishing connections with users remotely, offering personalized services, and enhancing overall user engagement.

In the context of rapid technological advancements, libraries undergo extensive infrastructural redevelopments and innovations, integrating digital media to amplify their global presence and influence. Digital marketing, encompassing promoting and selling services and products through online platforms, plays a pivotal role in this transformation. Strategies such as social media engagement, email marketing, search engine optimization, and online advertising empower libraries to effectively reach their target audiences in a more focused and measurable manner, thereby augmenting the efficacy of their marketing initiatives.

By leveraging social media and other digital platforms, libraries can market their services and disseminate relevant information in a way that resonates with users. Libraries are particularly active on platforms like Instagram, which allows them to engage with varied community groups and extend their services beyond traditional confines. Effective marketing is indispensable in informing users about accessible resources and services tailored to their needs and interests.

In Germany, Facebook and Instagram are the leading social media platforms. Instagram is particularly favoured among younger demographics, often referred to as digital natives (Bibliotheken 2023: Themen Zahlen Forderungen Wissenschaftliches Publizieren., [Bibliotheken 2023 final web.pdf](#)). Its visually driven interface and capacity for user engagement render Instagram a formidable tool for promoting library services to this crucial user segment.

This study investigates the experiences of academic libraries in Germany, focusing on the role of social media as a digital marketing strategy for promoting their services. Additionally, it seeks to explore how social media is utilized and its impact as a promotional tool in the context of these libraries. By researching these purposes, the study is expected to address the research problem of how social media can be strategically employed to enhance library services and attract a broader audience in the digital landscape.

2. Literature Review

The evolution of digital marketing has significantly impacted how organizations, including libraries, engage with their target audiences. Early developments in social media marketing, highlighted by the rise of platforms like Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram, have paved the way for innovative strategies emphasizing visual communication and user interaction. Instagram, known for its visual-centric approach, mainly attracts younger user demographics, making it an ideal platform for libraries seeking to connect with digital natives (Tapscott, 2009).

Libraries historically relied on manual marketing methods, such as flyers and newspaper advertisements, to inform users of their services. However, as the digital landscape evolved, libraries recognized the potential of social media to reach wider audiences and engage users more effectively. Research indicates that social media can be a vital tool for libraries to disseminate information and promote services (Phillips, 2015). For instance, Zuraida (2011) found that many students preferred online resources over traditional library visits, underscoring the importance of digital marketing strategies in attracting library users.

2.1. Digital Marketing Trends in Germany

In recent years, digital marketing trends in Germany have increasingly reflected the rising influence of social media platforms, with Instagram emerging as a particularly effective tool for engaging younger audiences. According to Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland (2023), while Facebook remains the dominant force in the social media landscape, Instagram's capacity for visual storytelling and engagement has made it the platform of choice for public libraries aiming to connect with younger users. The ability of libraries to present resources and events in visually appealing formats resonates strongly with this demographic, effectively fostering community relationships and participation.

Public libraries in Germany have taken the lead in employing innovative digital marketing strategies through social media, showcasing a pioneering spirit in user outreach. In stark contrast, university libraries have lagged in adopting these digital channels. A survey conducted by Arndt (2018) in October 2017 illustrated this discrepancy, revealing that of the 112 Instagram accounts identified for libraries throughout Germany, an overwhelming 84.8% were associated with public libraries, while only 15.2% belonged to university, state, and specialized collections libraries. Despite academic libraries exhibiting higher engagement levels on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, recent findings indicate that about 25% of these academic establishments remain inactive on any social media platform (Winterhager, 2018).

Helena Winterhager's investigation into social media engagement among academic libraries shed light on several factors explaining their reticence. Key issues identified include the lack of staff dedicated to managing social media activities, concerns about data privacy, especially regarding platforms like Facebook and an administrative reluctance to allocate time for librarians to keep pace with the rapidly changing dynamics of social media, which are often influenced by shifting algorithms. Additionally, traditional communication methods, such as newsletters, blogs, and pre-established university social media accounts, further contribute to the hesitation among academic libraries to engage more broadly on social platforms (Winterhager, 2018, pp. 6-7). However, while public libraries in Germany are leveraging the potential of social media to cultivate relationships and enhance outreach efforts, university libraries are yet to embrace these marketing trends fully. Addressing the factors hindering their engagement could enhance visibility and enrich community interaction. Therefore, this research study aims to explore the role of digital marketing in promoting academic libraries through social media, specifically focusing on the experiences of three academic libraries in Germany.

This investigation addresses a notable research gap within the university library sector, particularly concerning the application of social media as a marketing tool. This scarcity of existing literature on the subject underscores the necessity for a comprehensive examination of how academic libraries in Germany leverage digital platforms for promotional purposes.

3. Objectives of the Study

Main Objective: To examine the role of social media as a digital marketing strategy for promoting library services in academic libraries in Germany.

Specific Objectives:

1. To study the effectiveness of social media as a digital marketing instrument for promoting library services.
2. To analyze the digital marketing strategies employed by the social media teams in these academic libraries.
3. To identify the most effective social media platforms utilized for digital marketing within German academic libraries.

3.1. Research Methodology

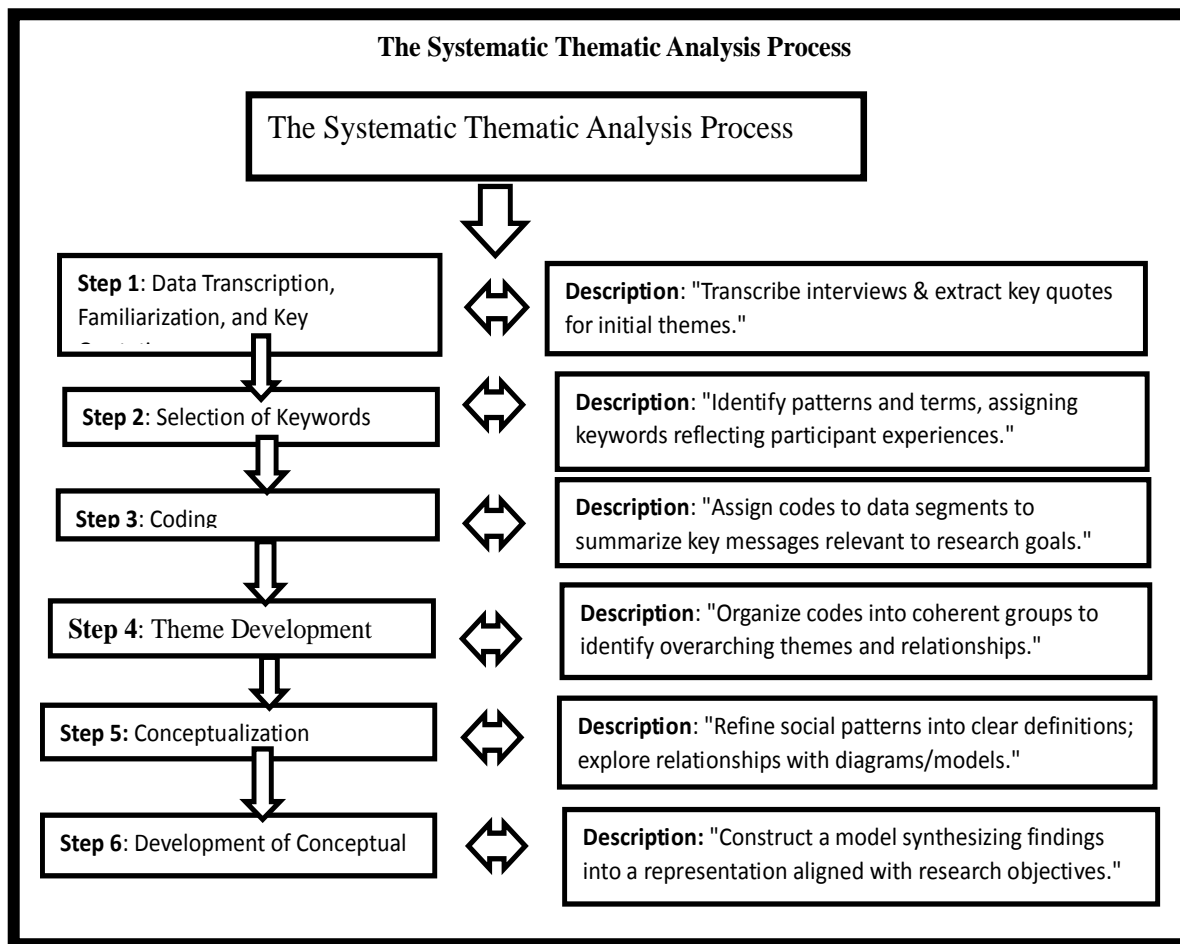
This study adopts a qualitative research framework, focusing on semi-structured interviews with library professionals from three academic institutions in Germany. The purposive sampling technique was utilized to select the sample for this study. Saxon State and University Library in Dresden, Freiburg

University Library, and Technical Information Bibliotheca. The Saxon State and University Library Dresden (SLUB) is one of Germany's foremost research libraries in Dresden, Saxony. Established in 1556, it offers a rich collection of over 10 million volumes, making it an essential resource for scholars and students. The library serves as a center for information and cultural heritage, housing extensive digital collections, archives, and special collections focused on various subjects, including art, history, and science. Utilize the library's digital collections, which include digitized manuscripts, rare books, and databases accessible through their online platform. Freiburg University Library, officially known as the Universitätsbibliothek Freiburg, is the central library of the University of Freiburg in Germany. Established in 1457, it is one of the oldest university libraries in the country and has a rich history of supporting academic research and education. The library houses a vast collection of books, journals, manuscripts, and digital resources across various disciplines, making it an essential resource for students, researchers, and faculty. Its modern facilities and services include study spaces, digital archives, interlibrary loans, and various research assistance programs, reflecting its commitment to fostering knowledge and scholarship in a vibrant academic community. The Technical Information Library (Technische Informationsbibliothek, TIB) in Germany is a leading institution dedicated to providing access to scientific and technical information. Located in Hanover, TIB serves as a central library for researchers, engineers, and scholars in science and technology. It offers a vast collection of books, journals, electronic resources, and specialized services such as data management and information support.

The primary objective of these interviews is to gain insights into the libraries' utilization of social media as a marketing tool, examining their strategies, challenges, and successes. This approach enables a detailed exploration of participants' views on the role of social media in promoting libraries. Interviews were conducted with the libraries' social media teams to collect data, and the libraries' social media activities were subsequently analyzed to extract key insights about their practices. Thematic analysis was employed to differentiate patterns and themes that surfaced throughout the interviews, allowing for a detailed understanding of each library's digital marketing strategy. The thematic analysis is a practical methodological approach for research to comprehensively explore individuals' perspectives, beliefs, knowledge, experiences, or values derived from qualitative data.

3.2. The Systematic Thematic Analysis Process

The systematic thematic analysis process involves six steps, each contributing to a thorough understanding of research data. Interview data analysis is essential in qualitative research, especially concerning digital marketing strategies in academic libraries. Initially, employing a narrative analytical framework recommended by Riessman (1993), the researcher transcribed the conversations while recording initial reflections, promoting an early connection with the data. To ensure accuracy, audio recordings were thoroughly reviewed multiple times, aligning with Braun and Clarke's (2006) principle of "repeated reading." This iterative approach promotes a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, which is essential for developing authentic insights. The researcher transcribes the data and extracts critical quotations for familiarization. Next, the researcher identifies recurring patterns and designates keywords encapsulating participants' experiences. This leads to systematic manual coding, where shortcodes summarize main messages, simplifying complex data into manageable units. Following this, codes are organized into coherent themes that reveal more profound insights and relationships within the data. Identifying themes necessitated careful consideration of their narratives and relations to the broader dataset, emphasizing achieving clarity in naming them. These examples highlighted vital issues and reinforced analytical conclusions (Figure 2). This analytical process aims to illuminate the role of digital marketing strategies in enhancing library promotion on social media, drawing from the collective experiences of four academic libraries in Germany. The process continues with conceptualization, where researchers refine ideas into precise definitions and finally conclude with developing a conceptual model that synthesizes findings and addresses research objectives. This structured approach enhances the research's consistency, replicability, and theoretical contributions. The following **Figure 1** illustrates the step-by-step process.



3.3. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis of the information provided about the social media strategies of Saxon State and University Library in Dresden, Leibniz Information Centre for Science and Technology University Library (TIB), and Freiburg University Library reveals several key themes. Below are the identified themes, descriptions, and supporting examples from the text. Further,

Figure 02 provides a visual summary of themes identified during the analysis. Spatially positioning keywords, codes, and themes illustrates relationships and the interplay between concepts.

3.4. Platform Utilization and Target Audience

As illustrated in Figure 2, the libraries show distinct approaches in engaging with various social media platforms, highlighting their understanding of target audiences. Dresden University Library primarily utilizes Facebook and Instagram. However, it acknowledges the need for more tailored content for each platform: As noted in Figure 2, "It feels more like a content management system than a strategic marketing plan." There is a recognition that the library's social media effectiveness has diminished. Additionally, the Dresden Library media team emphasized "the need to attract students and families." The library primarily utilizes Facebook and Instagram, which are managed through Meta Business Suite for planning and scheduling. A shift from a dedicated team to a single individual managing the accounts has resulted in content inconsistencies.

TIB University Library has a broader range of platforms (Instagram et al.) and strategically focuses on engaging students: "We engage with students through direct messages and comments." These multiple social media platforms indicate a strategic approach to effectively engaging different audiences. Each platform serves distinct purposes, reflecting an understanding of audience preferences and content alignment.

The Freiburg University Library has defined its target audience as young undergraduate students aged 18 to 25. This focus shapes their content creation, marketing strategies, and platform choices. The library's Instagram theme, "We for you," reflects its commitment to serving students, and the choice to

avoid Facebook aligns with this emphasis on appealing to a younger demographic. "The library's social media team preferred to focus on platforms more popular among its target demographic.": "Our focus is on young undergraduate students...", "The use of apple green to differentiate ourselves..."

3.5. Content Strategy and Engagement

All three libraries grapple with developing effective content strategies that resonate with their audiences. The need for engagement through tailored content is a central concern. Dresden University Library acknowledges a lack of unique content that fits the platform: "Our challenge lies in creating unique content that appeals to each audience rather than just reusing the same posts." TIB University Library reports successful engagement through videos and direct interaction: "We produced a video showing students studying... This content has received positive feedback and emphasizes our support for students." Freiburg University Library has adopted a theme ("We for you") to foster connection and engagement with young students, indicating a focused content strategy.

3.6. Content Policies and Management

The TIB library's social media presence of content policies emphasizes professionalism and transparency, setting a framework for respectful communication and open dialogue with students. The Freiburg University library's varied content strategy is critical to the library's approach, capturing students' interest through different types of posts ranging from educational to entertaining. Including light-hearted posts, service announcements, educational resources, themed series, and unique content like Halloween posts illustrates the library's commitment to content diversity. The Freiburg University social media team has identified the tendency to post the same content across different platforms as a barrier to effective engagement.

3.7. Resource Allocation and Team Structure

The libraries differ in their organizational structure and allocation of resources for social media management, affecting their outreach capabilities. Dresden University Library currently lacks a dedicated team, with social media efforts being managed by one individual supported by colleagues: "I manage the social media efforts with some support from colleagues." TIB University Library benefits from a six-member communications team dedicated to library communications, which allows for a more comprehensive approach to social media: "I work in the TIB Communications team, which... consists of six members." Freiburg University Library's recent entry into Instagram and cohesive visual identity highlights its focused yet resource-efficient approach: "The main theme is 'We for you,' and the visual identity features apple green."

3.8. Visual Identity and Branding

The Dresden University social media group has identified the importance of maintaining a consistent color palette that aligns with the university's branding. Ensuring that social media posts are visually appealing is essential to engaging an audience. The Freiburg Library emphasizes a distinct and cohesive visual identity, setting it apart from other institutions. The choice of apple green as the primary color symbolizes this intent. The use of apple green to differentiate itself from the commonly used blue in universities and libraries indicates a strategic approach to branding. Organizational tools like Trello assist in maintaining visual consistency across posts. The TIB social media team utilizes the "DEINE UNIBIB" campaign to brand the library, as illustrated in **Figure 2**. This branding initiative aims to personalize the library experience for students, making it feel more accessible and relevant. It also promotes student engagement and ownership of library resources.

3.9. Adaptation to Digital Trends

As shown in **Figure 2**, each library demonstrates an understanding of evolving digital trends and audience preferences, adjusting their strategies accordingly. The decline in Facebook's effectiveness is noted by TIB University Library, which discontinued its account after three years: "We discontinued our Facebook account... as it was not reaching our target audience." Freiburg University Library's establishment of its Instagram account in late 2022 demonstrates a timely response to the platform's

growing popularity among students. Dresden University Library recognizes the need to increase social media engagement to better serve its community: "We could promote these services more aggressively on social media."

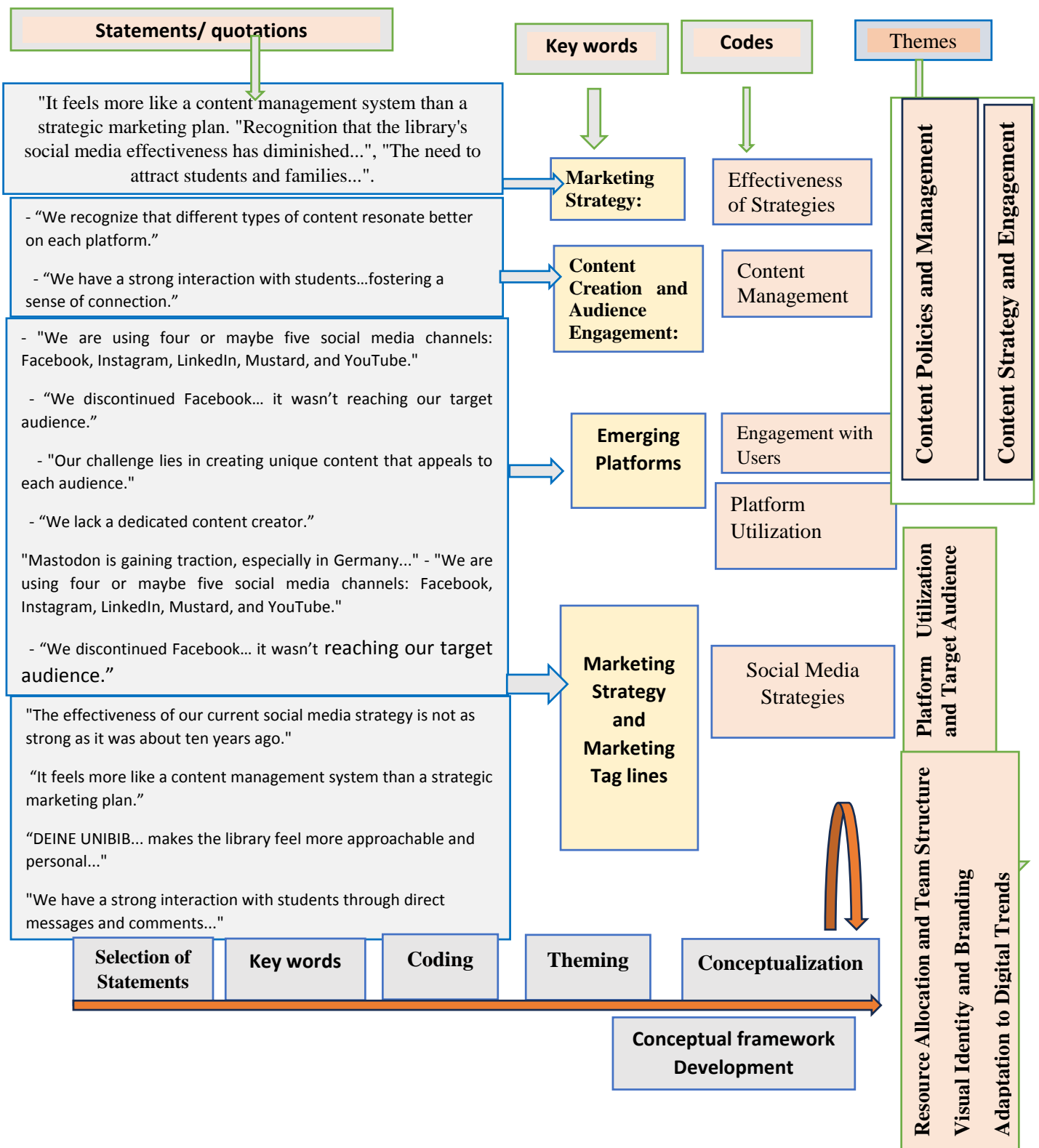


Fig.2 Visualizing Key Words, Codes, and Themes

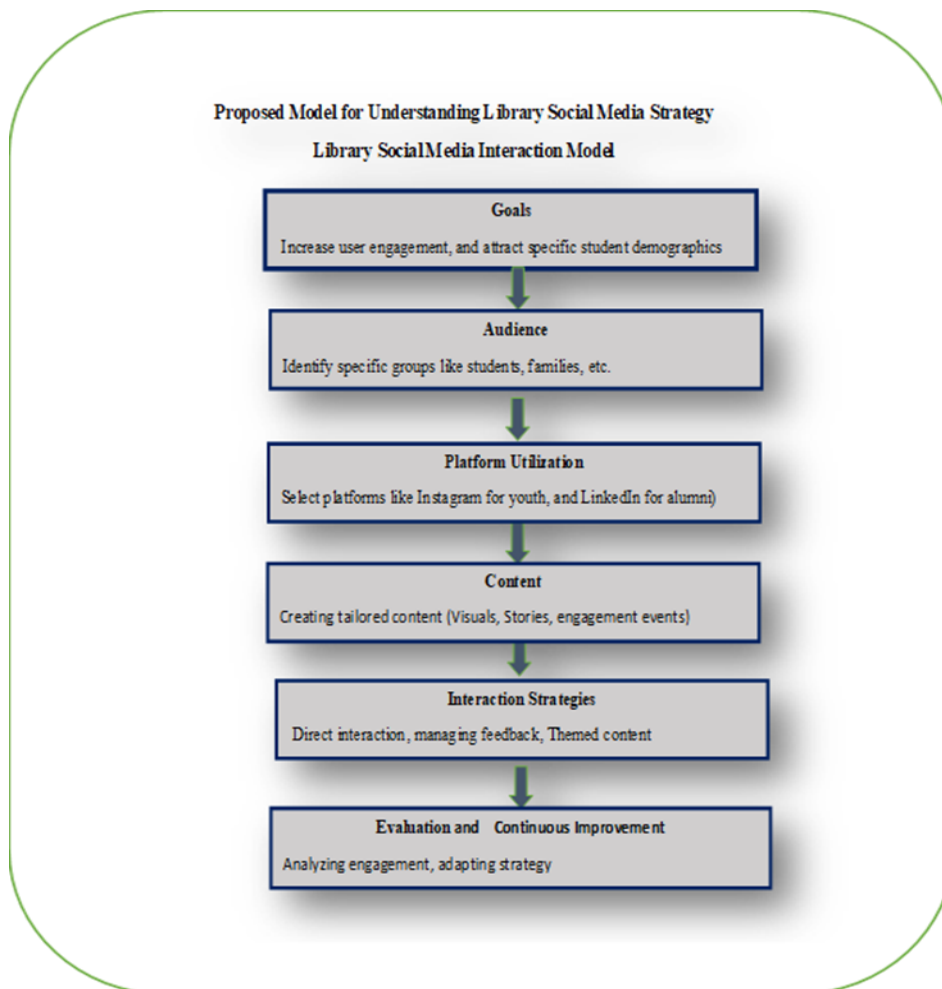


Fig. 3 Library Social Media Interaction Model

3.10. Library Social Media Interaction Model

The "Library Social Media Interaction Model," **illustrated in Figure 3**, is a strategic framework that helps libraries effectively use social media to engage their communities and achieve specific objectives. **As shown in Figure 3**, this model presents a structured approach that guarantees each step informs and improves the following phases of social media engagement.

3.11. Model Structure Overview

1. Goals: The model's foundation is the establishment of clear objectives. Libraries must identify what they hope to achieve through their social media presence, such as increasing patron engagement, attracting specific student demographics, or promoting new programs and services. Clarifying these goals sets the direction for all subsequent actions.

2. Audience: Understanding the target audience is crucial. This phase involves identifying specific groups the library aims to engage, such as students, families, seniors, and local community members. By defining the audience, libraries can tailor their messaging and outreach efforts to resonate with distinct community segments.

3. Platform Utilization: Different social media platforms serve various demographics and purposes. In this stage, libraries select the most appropriate platforms for their target audiences. For instance, Instagram may be chosen for its appeal to younger users, while LinkedIn could be prioritized for connecting with alumni and professionals. The choice of platform directly influences how effectively the library can reach and interact with its audience.

4. Content: Content creation is where libraries can showcase their unique offerings. This stage involves developing tailored content that speaks to the interests and needs of the identified audience. Libraries may create visuals, engaging stories, or promotional materials for events. Ensuring content is relevant and appealing encourages user interaction and fosters community interest.

5. Interaction Strategies: Maintaining active engagement is critical in this phase. Libraries implement direct interaction techniques, manage audience feedback, and create themed content that aligns with ongoing trends or events. Strategies can include Q&A sessions and live events, fostering a vibrant online community where users feel valued and involved.

6. Evaluation and Continuous Improvement: The final stage of the model focuses on assessing the effectiveness of the strategies employed. Libraries analyze engagement data, gather feedback from the community, and study interaction metrics. This evaluation allows libraries to adapt their approach continuously, ensuring that their social media strategy remains practical and relevant to the evolving needs of their audience.

4. Conclusion

The thematic analysis reveals distinct approaches to social media strategies among the three examined libraries, emphasizing their responses to audience needs, content challenges, resource allocation, and adaptation to digital environments. Despite sharing overarching goals of engagement and outreach, their varied strategies highlight the necessity of customizing methods to fit unique institutional identities and target audiences. The analysis illustrates the diverse ways university libraries navigate communication and branding in a digital context. By prioritizing user needs and implementing tailored strategies, libraries can strengthen their relevance and cultivate supportive communities.

Key findings indicate that structured team organization and flexibility in audience engagement are pivotal. For instance, TIB University Library demonstrates the advantages of a well-defined communications team fostering effective user engagement through clear messaging. In contrast, the Dresden University Library faces challenges due to the absence of a dedicated social media team, resulting in inconsistencies that undermine audience interaction. This situation underscores the necessity for dedicated resources to enhance digital marketing efforts. The Freiburg University Library, on the other hand, effectively engages young students through targeted strategies that promote community collaboration and consistent branding.

Furthermore, the multichannel marketing approach adopted by Technical Information Bibliotheca illustrates the effectiveness of diverse platforms in catering to audience preferences. TIB and Freiburg Libraries emphasize the importance of personalizing content to forge emotional connections with users, thus improving satisfaction and interaction. However, Dresden's experiences illustrate the urgent need for continuous reassessment of social media strategies to maintain their impact.

The successful utilization of platforms like Instagram across these libraries demonstrates a significant trend in academic library practices. By harnessing Instagram's visual strengths, libraries can enhance visibility and foster community engagement. While TIB and Freiburg showcase effective engagement strategies, Dresden's challenges call for a thorough re-evaluation of their approach.

A key takeaway from this analysis is the importance of creating tailored content that resonates with specific demographics, particularly younger audiences. Establishing a coherent visual identity further strengthens brand recognition and user connections. By actively engaging users, soliciting feedback, and fostering collaborations with community organizations, libraries can enhance their marketing efforts and extend their outreach.

The proposed "Library Social Media Interaction Model" is a strategic framework for libraries aiming to refine their social media approaches. By systematically addressing components from goal setting to evaluation, this model facilitates the development of meaningful connections with audiences, promotes adequate service visibility, and supports adaptability in an evolving digital landscape. This framework aims to strengthen the library-user relationship and effective community engagement.

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